have demanded a higher royalty on oil extracted in the State;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

(c) the reaction of the Central Government thereto?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF PETROLEUM AND NATURAL.GAS (SHRI T.R. BAALU): (a) and (b) For the block period 1996-99, Government of Assam has demanded royalty on crude oil at the rate of Rs. 1204/- per metric tonne as against the present 'on account' rate of Rs. 578/- per metric tonne.

(c) In view of the changed environment and the need to provide for a transparent and reasonable methodology for fixation of rates of royalty on crude oil payable to the State Governments, certain amendments to the Oilfields (Regulation and Development) Act, 1948 are considered necessary.

Rise in accidents at level crossings

424. SHRI RAJUBHAI A. PARMAR:
SHRIMATI VEENA VERMA:
SHRI SUSHILKUMAR SAM-BHAJIRAO SHINDE:

Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that level crossing accidents have lately been increasing;

(b) if so, the number, details and casualties involved in each during each of the three quarters in 1997-98 (so far); and

(c) what steps have been and are being taken to prevent and curb the accidents including manning and mechanising of level crossing and providing rail over-bridges; indicating the Eighth Plan targets and achievements and provisions for it under Ninth Five Year Plan?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) and (b) No, Sir. The number of level crossing accidents on Indian Railways during April to October, 1997 was 36 as compared to 38 during corresponding period of last year. Casualties in level crossing accidents during 1997-98 are as under:

Period	Killed	Injured
Apr.-June '97	32	13
July-Sept: '97	17	78
October '97	17	26

(c) The sensitive unmanned level crossings will be, on a planned basis, after due prioritisation, converted into manned level crossing with the help of the State Govts, who have to invest the initial capital cost.

Railways construct Road over/Under bridges in lieu of existing busy level crossings i.e. having a traffic density of 100000 or more Train Vehicle Units. However, wherever the proposals are sponsored by the State Govts, or local authorities for replacement of a level crossing having lesser traffic units, they arc also considered for replacement on deposit terms for which the entire cost of the construction and recurring maintenance are borne by the sponsoring body. Census on the level crossings are conducted every five years and when the level crossings are found busy i.e. having attained 100000 or more TVUs, they are considered for replacement with Road over/Under Bridges on cost sharing basis. Hence, no specific target in any particular plan is kept in this respect, but efforts are made to include maximum busy crossings proposed by State Govts.

Rail accidents

425. SHRIMATI JAYANTI PAT-NAIK: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the rail accidents are on the increase;

(b) if so, the number of rail accidents that have taken place between 1st July, 1996 and 31st October, 1997 (date-wise and train-routc-wise);

(c) the reasons for the increase of accidents;

(d) whether Government have formulated any strategy to prevent rail accidents; and

(e) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF RAILWAYS (SHRI RAM VILAS PASWAN): (a) to (c) There were 512 consequential train accidents on Indian Railways during the period 1-7-1996 to 31-10-1997. The accidents were due to human failure, equipment failure, sabotage and other miscellaneous factors. The labour involved in compiling date-wise and train-routc-wise information will not be commensurate with the results proposed to be achieved.

(d) and (e) Ensuring safety in train operations is a continuous process. Some of the steps in this direction are as follows:

(i) The work of track circuiting has been accelerated on the trunk routes and other important main lines,

(it) Modification of the signalling circuitry is being carried out to minimise chances of human errors in causing accidents.

(iii) Auxiliary warning system for giving advance warning about 'signal at danger' to the driver of the running train has been commissioned on Mumbai suburban sections.

(iv) There has been progressive increase in use of Tie Tamping and ballast cleaning machines for track maintenance.

(v) For monitoring track geometry and running characteristics of the track, sophisticated track rocording cars, oscillograph cars and portable accclerомctcr are being progressively used.

(vi) Maintenance facilities for coaches and wagons have been modernised and upgraded at many depots.

(vii) To prevent cases of cold breakage of axle, ROH Depots have been equipped with ultrasonic testing equipment for detection of flaws in the axles.

(viii) Whistle boards/speed breakers and road signs have been provided at unmanned level crossings and visibility for drivers has been improved.

(ix) Audio-visual publicity campaigns to educate road users on how to make a safe crossing are conducted;

(x) Steps have been taken to prevent inflammable and explosive materials from being carried in passenger trains.

(xi) Training facilities for drivers, guards and staff connected with train operation have been modernised including use of simulators for training of drivers.

(xii) Refresher courses are regularly organised at specified intervals.

(xiii) Performance of the staff connected with train operations is being constantly monitored and those found deficient are sent for crash training.

(xiv) Periodical safety drives are conducted to inculcate safety consciousness among the staff.

Estimated additional expenses to make Calcutta Metro more operational

426. SHRI ASHOK MITRA: Will the Minister of RAILWAYS be pleased to state:

(a) whether any estimates are available of the annual additional working expenses in case the Calcutta Metro is made operational from six O'clock in the morning till midnight everyday including Sundays;

(b) whether similar projections have been made of additional resources likely to be generated from such and extension of the Metro services; and

(c) whether Government agrees that there is a strong case for supplying a